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# the jmas newsletter

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Compiled/Edited by: Ellis Andur, Larry Bieri and John B. Hanson-Lowe

\*\*\* REPORT ON THE JUNE 1984 GENERAL MEETING \*\*\*

SELF CULTIVATION THROUGH THE BOW AND ARROW

The Society's fifth General Meeting was held June 17th, 1984, at the New Sanno Center from 4:00 P.M. Mr. Ron Finne, JMAS Member and long time practitioner of Japanese archery, kindly volunteered to play host to the evening's interesting presentation. After a brief review of the March General Meeting by the Secretary, we moved into the main part of the event. Mr. Finne prefaced the entire program with relevant comments on Japanese archery and the Zen Nihon Kyudo Renmei which presently is the parent body of the modern kyudo movement. After briefly explaining the kyu-dan ranking system employed by the Federation, he introduced Onuma Hideharu Sensei and two of his non-Japanese deshi, Mr. Dan DeProspero and Ms. Jackie DePropero. Onuma Sensei is an 8th dan level Hanshi (master teacher) of kyudo.

To begin the evening, Sensei showed a video tape of formal archery demonstrations, and commented on the art and its essence while those present watched the silent action on the screen. This was followed by a further lecture presented by Mr. DeProspero, and demonstrations of traditional Japanese archery in various styles by all three participants. A question and answer period completed the presentation.

KYUDO: THE WAY OF THE BOW AND ARROW

by

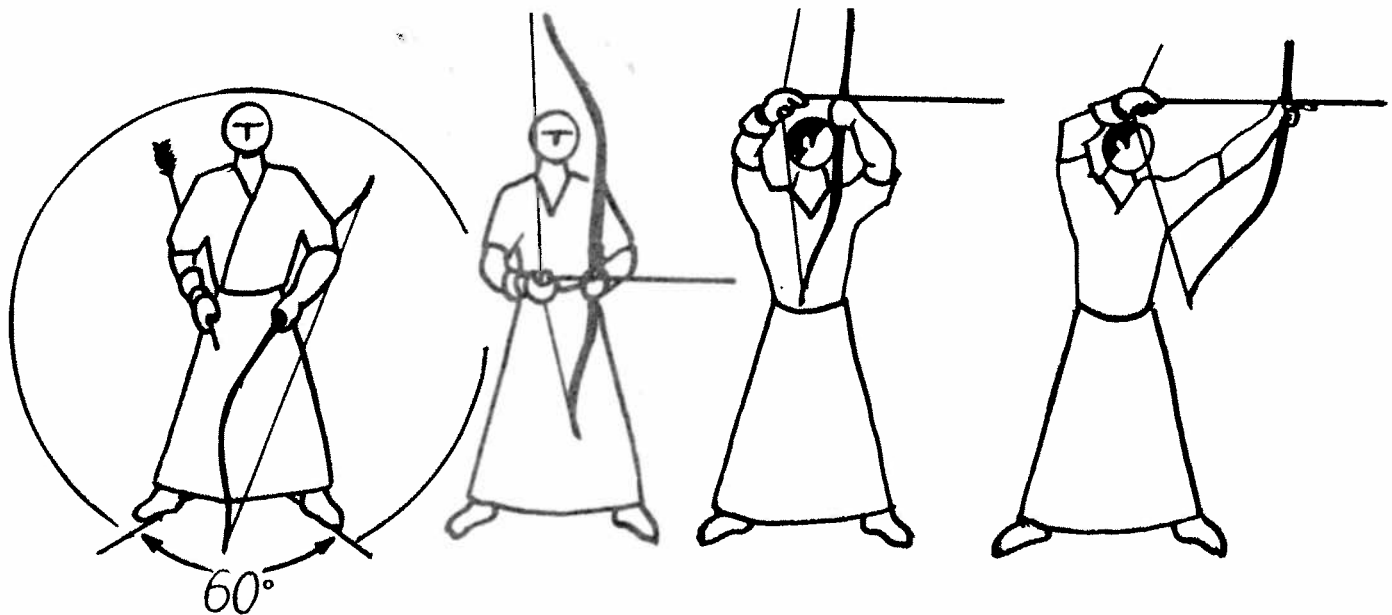
Onuma Hideharu

I would like to thank the Japan Martial Arts Society for inviting me to speak on the art of Japanese kyudo. I began my study of kyudo at an early age under the instruction of my father, who was a master of the Heki Ryu Sekka Ha style of Japanese archery. Later I became involved in Ogasawara Ryu ceremonial archery.

Ogasawara Ryu and Heki Ryu are the two main schools of archery in Japan today. Heki Ryu is the larger school. The two traditions differ somewhat in form and purpose.

Ogasawara Ryu is a tradition of formal ceremony. Kyudo is but one part of this style, since it also encompasses performances for such occasions as weddings, giftgiving, religious functions and other special events where a formal ceremony is required. It is a highly refined and ritualized style of archery comparable to sado, Japanese Tea Ceremony.

Of course, the Japanese yumi (bow) was not originally designed for ceremony. It was, as were all bows, a weapon and that is where we find the roots of the Heki Ryu style; with the warriors. Heki Ryu was developed about 600 years ago by a great master archer named Heki Danjo. He had a considerable influence on archery in Japan. Before Heki, archery was used mainly for long distance shooting in battles. The archers fired in groups, raining long arcs of arrows down on the enemy. Their method of drawing the bow at that time called for pulling



Yugamae

Torikake

Uchiokoshi

Daisan

the string back to about mid-chest level while the left arm pushed the bow toward the sky. This enabled the archer to fire extremely long distances with relative ease. With the passage of time, however, the style of warfare changed, and the archer came to need more accuracy in shooting. Heki Danjo changed the draw so that the string was pulled back at shoulder level, and the front arm was extended straight out. This greatly enhanced the archer's ability to aim accurately.

Heki Danjo had seven famous *deshi*, or followers, who branched off to form separate schools. The four most famous traditions to result were: Heki Ryu Sekka Ha, Heki Ryu Chikurin Ha, Heki Ryu Insai Ha and Heki Ryu Dosetsu Ha. Each had their own special methods and emphasis. Most schools today are related to Heki Ryu. As for myself, I am the 15th generation headmaster of the Heki Ryu Sekka Ha. However, I no longer teach Heki Ryu.

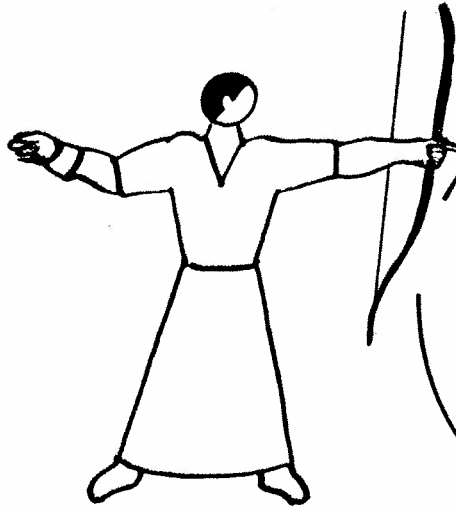
All schools say that the highest school is "no school." There are many paths to the top of the mountain but the top itself is "no-path." This "no-school" archery is what we call "kyudo" today, and this is what I now teach.

In "no school" *kyudo* we say, "Act according to the time and the place." In other words, when we do anything, we should have a purpose appropriate to the occasion and we should follow that purpose. Heki Ryu was for combat. Its purpose was for killing. Technique and accuracy were of prime importance. I studied technique from Heki Ryu. Ogasawara Ryu is for ceremony. It is a highly ritualistic performance; a tradition of etiquette. I studied ceremony from Ogasawara Ryu.

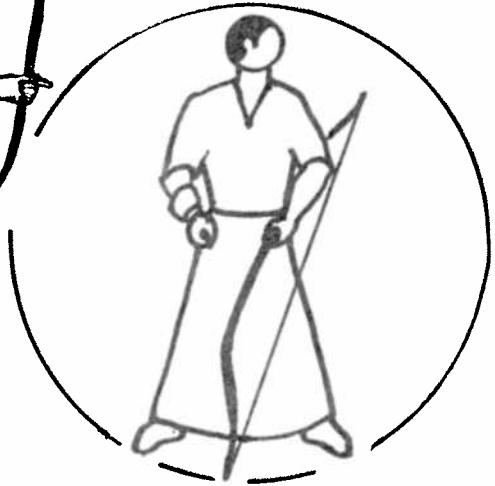
*Kyudo* today, however, is more than technique or ceremony. *Kyudo* must have a higher purpose. The *kyudoka*, the modern archer, now practices for reasons of health, and for the development of a noble character and personality. His purpose is to cultivate purity and righteousness in both his spirit and art. He enters his study of *kyudo* giving deepest consideration to the loftiness and far reachingness of the art. He is fully aware of its capacity to instill in him the virtuous qualities of



Kai



Hanare & Zanshi



Zanshin

### The Standard Draw of Modern Kyudo

truth, fortitude, modesty, harmony, sincerity, and (After Sollier, 1969) self-control. This is why we practice the form of **kyudo** that we do today, and these ideals should be reflected in the movements and shooting of the **kyudoka**.

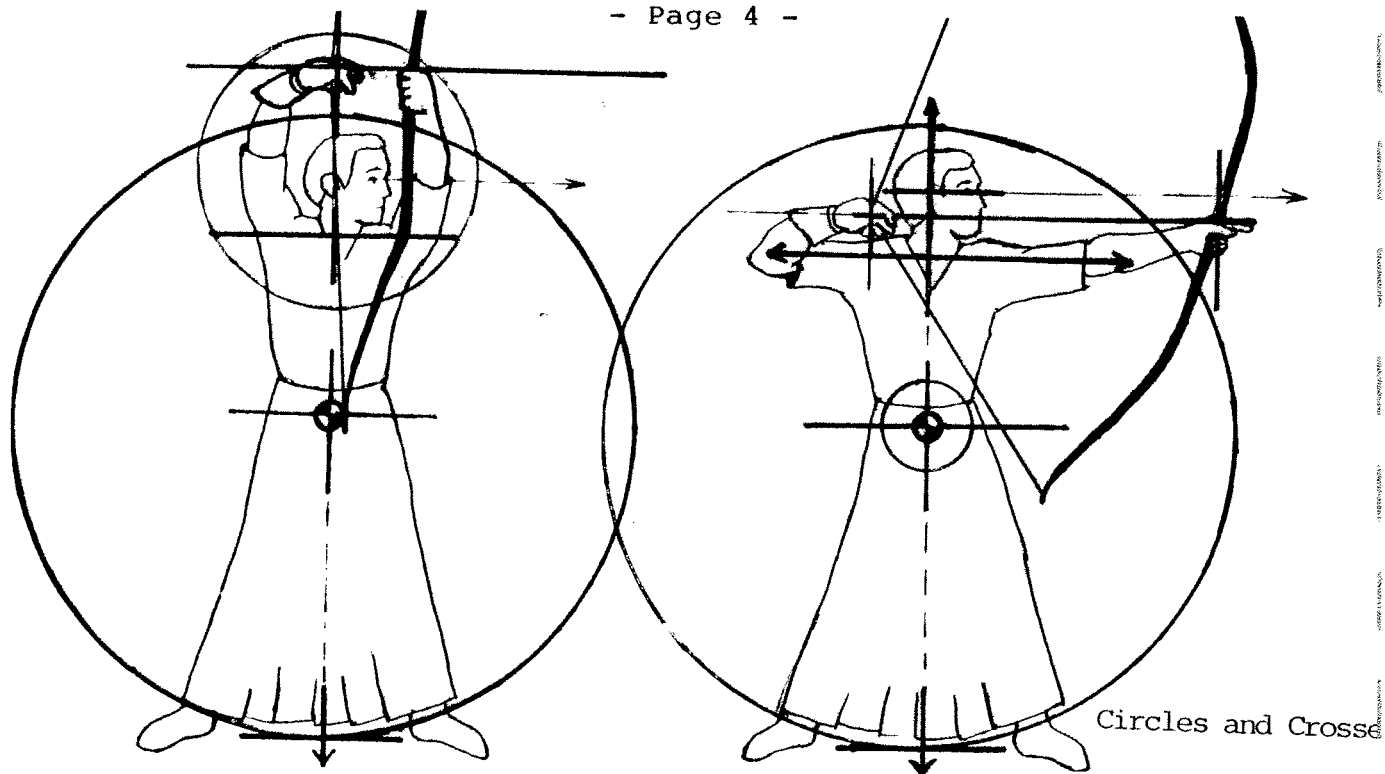
**Kyudo** has been called "standing Zen," or a religion without words. What this means is that at the highest level of shooting, the practitioner must free his mind of all worldly thoughts. His shooting is pure. He doesn't think of technique, and he doesn't simply go through some ritual movements. He doesn't shoot to win prizes, nor does he shoot to impress others. He shoots for God.

Anyone watching cannot help but be affected by the pureness and beauty of his shooting, the goodness of his heart, the nobleness of his character. He manages to communicate these qualities through his art, without uttering a single word. This is why we say **kyudo** is an unspoken religion. This is a quality that every **kyudoka** must strive to develop.

I have explained what qualities we look for in shooting. Now I'd like to say a little about how to shoot, and what makes good form.

It is very important to stand straight. The head and backbone must be kept straight, as if suspended from above by a thread. The hips, shoulders, and the arrow must all be in a straight line with the target. The figure of the cross (+) is also very important in **kyudo**. There are many "cross" relationships. The hips and the spine form a cross. So do the shoulders and neck, the bow and arrow, the hand and bow, and so on.

Although straight line and perpendicular relationships are important in **kyudo**, you must appear round in your shooting. We say, "Roundness is truth, roundness is beauty, roundness is goodness." **Kyudo** should be round. To achieve this quality of roundness, the body must be kept soft and filled with spirit. The spirit begins in the **hara**, the stomach area, and moves outwardly in all directions. All movements are



done with spirit. We call this "suki no nai taisei," which is a posture of alertness (literally, a posture which has no vulnerable openings). The bow is drawn and the shot is completed with spirit.

To make a proper shot in kyudo, you must make the mind pure and calm. This is called "muga no kyochi," and is a state of emptiness (literally, the realm of non-self). Many beginners confuse this state with one labeled "muga muchu," a state of absorption. With *muga muchu*, the archer is so intent on shooting and hitting the target that he is oblivious to all about him. *Muga no kyochi*, on the other hand, is a state where the mind sees everything but is not disturbed nor altered from its purpose. If a needle drops, the *kyudoka* is aware of it; yet even if thunder should crash, it can not affect his movement.

All of this separates *kyudo* from sport, but perhaps one of the biggest differences is the idea that there is no perfect shot. In sport archery, if the archer hits the bull's-eye he thinks, "That was good," and he tries to recreate that shot the next time he shoots. In *kyudo*, on the contrary, even if the form is good and you hit the center of the target, you must not try to recreate that shot. We say, "One thousand arrows or 10,000, each should be new." Each time you shot, it should be better than the time before. "*Kyudo* is endless effort," is what I always tell my students. There can be no perfect shot so you must always strive to do better.

To learn anything, we must first study technique and *kyudo* is no exception. There are many techniques involved in the learning of *kyudo*. We learn them until they melt into our blood. Then we forget them. When we shoot, we do so naturally... without thinking of technique.

Lets's take the seemingly simple action of the release of the arrow, that split second called "*hanare*." The technique may not seem so difficult; one merely lets go of the string. But we must not think of releasing. *Hanare* must come naturally. We think of our body growing

up from the ground like a big tree. Energy from the ground travels up our legs, through our hara and outward through our arms. The mind is calm. The release "happens." We never think, "I'm going to let go now." We shoot without thinking of how to shoot.

This idea of shooting without thinking about the shot is an important part of "no school" kyudo. There are three types of shooting in Japanese archery:

Toteki, which means "hit the target,"  
Kanteki, which means "pierce the target," and  
Zaiteki, which means "exist in the target."

In toteki, the archer hits the target without any consideration as to form. Like a gamester at a carnival booth, his only purpose is to hit the target with the arrow. This is the style of the sports archer. With kanteki, the archer's purpose is to pierce the target; to "kill" the target with his arrow. This is the style of the warrior. In modern kyudo, however, our purpose is not to hit or pierce the target. Japanese archery in its highest form is zaiteki. The archer is filled with spirit. His form is round. His mind is pure and calm. The arrow exists in the target before it leaves the bow. This is right shooting. This is Japanese kyudo.



... without thinking ...

After hearing all of this you may well think that kyudo is very difficult. You should not think this way, however. There are only eight steps to keep in mind in the standing form, and they take only a minute or so to complete. Just remember to stand straight, be careful of the "cross" relationships, keep your body soft and round, and shoot with spirit. I ask you, therefore, to think of kyudo not as something that is complicated and impossible to learn, but as a simple art which requires only a good heart, determination, and the desire to become all that a human being can be.

#### OTHER BUSINESS

by

Phil Relnick, JMAS President

It has become customary for us to use the last 15 minutes or so of each General Meeting to provide you with information or other business of interest to you as Society Members. We have come to call it simply "Other Business," and will probably just continue to do so unless anyone has a better name for it.

(At this point the President presented Onuma Sensei with a Certificate of Appreciation and an Honorary JMAS Membership for the 1984 membership year. He expressed our thanks to Sensei and to his students, Dan and Jackie DeProspero, for their very interesting presentation.)

Let me tell you about the rest of 1984. We have scheduled a talk on karate for our September 16th General Meeting. And remember to keep

December 9th open when you plan your year-end. That is the date of our December General Meeting. The topic will be judo.

Our trip to a sword smith in Tokyo will be in October. We don't have a specific date yet, but it will most likely be on a Saturday. We will start by showing a film on sword making, then have a talk by the sword smith. Finally we will watch him make a sword. Details of the excursion will be sent to members as soon as they are finalized. We wanted to schedule this activity for the spring, but it was not convenient for the smith, and since many of our members would be away on summer vacation, we decided to have it after the September General Meeting. JMAS trips and activities other than the General Meetings are open only to members.

Speaking membership, I'd like to remind you that we are now in the 1984 JMAS membership year. Please update your membership as soon as possible if you have not yet done so. Simply send your dues, along with your name and membership number, to

JMAS C.P.O. Box 270, Tokyo, 100 (Japan).

Membership fees are ¥4000 a year (\$20.00 for overseas members). New members should include the one-time-only registration fee of ¥1000 (\$25.00 total, overseas).

As you may have noticed, our audio-visual man, Dave Dimmick, is always in the back of the room video-taping our meetings. We have had some problems with lighting, so if anyone has any good ideas on improving the illumination of this room please contact Dave about it.

The next subject is our usual dinner after each Meeting. I mentioned at the last Meeting that we have to inform the hotel as to how many people will attend the meal, so we need reservations from you as early as possible. If you have never attended, let me say that it is a buffet style and is held right next door. The price of the all-you-can-eat meal is ¥3000, and there is a cash bar for those who need something to wash down their food.

We took a chance last March and made reservations for 50 members; 49 actually came. That was perfect. However, if only 40 people would have stayed for dinner, JMAS would have had to pay for the remaining 10 meals. For this evening's dinner, we have only received about 15 actual reservations. Even so, when I talked to people about it they say, "Sure I'm going to stay for it." Up to now we have been asking members to make reservations by phone or by mail. If there are any ideas on a better and inexpensive way of finding out who will attend future dinners, please let us know. Remember, we are a non-profit society with a relatively small budget, so help us avoid wasting your contributions by cooperating in our reservations system. The dinner is a chance for all of us to get together and enjoy ourselves, and maybe have some interesting give-and-take about martial arts.

Finally, if you have any particular subjects you would like to have presented at the General Meetings, please let us hear from you.

(The meeting was then formally closed by Master of Ceremonies Ron Finne and everyone moved into the adjoining room for dinner.)

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FEATURES

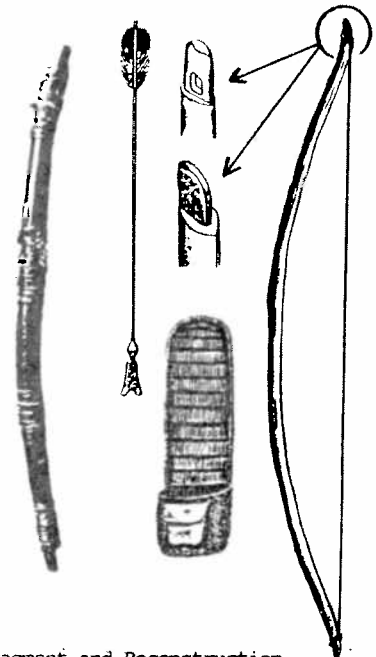
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**YUMI, THE JAPANESE BOW: A Brief History**

by  
Larry E. Bieri

June's presentation by Onuma Sensei well conveyed the sense of modern kyudo, the aims and the atmosphere of an art that is most difficult to express in words. In some sense it was precisely his avoidance of technical data and an analytical approach that made it possible for him to project the spiritual emphasis of the modern practice of archery in Japan. During the question and answer period, however, some of those in the audience asked questions about the history of the weapon itself, its construction, and the theory of its practical use. For this reason, it may be well to include a slightly more worldly look at the bow and arrow as it evolved in Japan over the ages.

Though its history is far from clear, the very oldest bows in Japan seem to have been rather small "self bows." These instruments were made of a single piece of wood which was simply shaped to points on either end, and then strung to form the typical "bow" shape. This early type must have been much like the bows found in other places around the world, and is called a *maruki-yumi*, the "solid wood bow." (This term is used to refer to all designs in all periods which were not compounded of several pieces of material.) In prehistoric times it appears to have been symmetrical, having its grip in the center of an overall length which varied from between 70 to 150 centimeters. It was a relatively weak weapon and was used at close range. Arrows were made of light-weight reed or willow shafts, simply fletched with two feathers and tipped with stone or bone. Bronze and iron tips came into use later, but only by those wealthy enough to afford them. Higher grade weapons were often lacquered, and some used metal fittings at the tips where the string was applied.



Fragment and Reconstruction  
of Ancient Symmetrical "Maruki Yumi"

(All illustrations after Sasama, 1981)

The bow in Japan began as a rather typical example of an almost universal human tool. In the historic period, however, we find that it has already changed into a form which has the grip placed about one-third up from the basal end of the bow when held vertically in shooting position. Exactly when and why it deviated from the normal form and developed the distinctive configuration that is recognized as characteristic of Japanese bows has been the subject of much speculation. What was it that caused this configuration to come into favor? In response to this question, Onuma sensei offered two 'possibilities.'

In one, the theory is that when making a bow from a trunk of a small tree, the root area would be thicker and more resilient than the upper portion due to the natural form and wood content of the plant. To

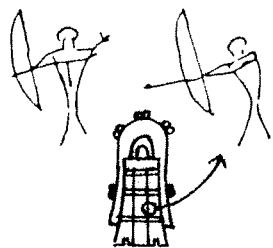


compensate for this "imbalance" in the resilience of the wood, the bowmaker evolved the idea of extending the upper portion, making it longer. They thus balanced the stronger lower third with more wood in the higher two thirds.

Sensei's other offering was more speculative. He suggested that the archer may have sought to impress or intimidate his opponent with the size of his weapon. A large bow implied a strong archer. Thus, as the length of the bow grew, it became necessary to hold it lower on the bow body in order that the lower "arm" and string not be fouled in the grass or brush. This had the double advantage of freeing the shot from obstruction and further extending the height of the bow, making it appear even longer.

There are other theories as well. One suggests that the archer often shot from a crouching posture. As the bow became longer, a trend that was to continue even up to the postwar period, it became difficult to fire from this position when holding it in the center of its body, again because it would foul on the ground. Moreover, since the use of the bow in Japan developed from the central Asian tradition, the arrow is positioned on the outside when knocking; that is, to the right of the bow when viewed from the archer's side. This fact precludes tilting the bow to a horizontal position by rotating the left wrist inward to the right as is done by many hunting peoples who, as we do in the west, traditionally place the arrow on the left side of the bow. Rotating to the left feels unnatural and places great strain on the left arm and shoulder. Thus the solution was to move the grip down the body and adjust the curvature of the upper and lower portions of the bow, its "arms," to give a balanced cast. This is what gives the Japanese bow its uniquely beautiful form at full draw.

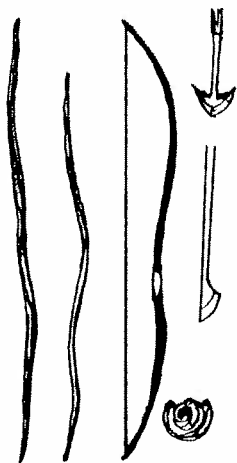
Yet another explanation relates the development of the asymmetrical form to the battlefield use of the long bow by mounted warriors. In this theory, the grip is moved down in order to make it easier for the archer on horseback to move the bow back and forth over the neck of the horse when firing to the left and right. Like the previous idea, a shorter basal arm would allow the warrior to shift the bow with less worry of fouling, this time on the reins and neck of the animal. It also meant that the archer have to do less lifting when changing the line of fire.



Bell Etchings

Whatever the reason, it is generally believed that the change took place during the Tumulus period (c. 250 - c. 550 A.D.). Ceremonial bronze "bells" of the period are etched with designs showing bowmen carrying what appear to be asymmetrical bows. By the Nara period (710 - 784 A.D.), the bow in Japan had certainly acquired its basic form with a long upper arm and shorter basal arm. Yumi preserved in the ancient Shoso-In storehouse date from the 8th century. These bows range from 166 to 266 centimeters in length, and are asymmetrical wooden "self bows." Their arrows are about 70 cms. long and indicate that the string was pulled back to about the center of the chest. This technique probably closely resembled the draw still employed by the Mongols. These central Asians also put the arrow to the outside of the bow, and their technique is the probable ancestor of archery in Japan. As Onuma Sensei explained, such a draw would be

practical for long range intradictory fire which requires high, arching trajectories.

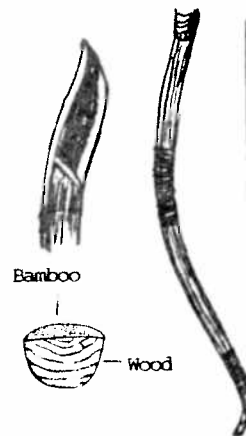


Shosoin Bows and Section

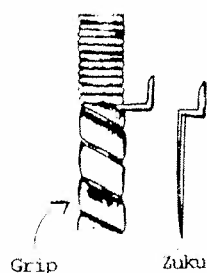
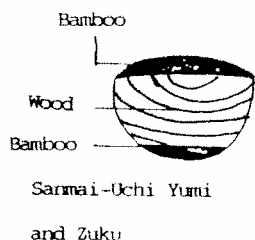
The one-piece "self bow" (maruki yumi) eventually evolved into a composite bow which combined various pieces of wood and bamboo in increasingly complex structures. The earliest of these attempts at increasing the range and power off the plain wooden bow was made during the Heian period (794 - 1185). A strip of bamboo was laminated to the face of the wooden bow in the unstrung position and held there by adhesives and wrappings of cord or rattan. After the bonding was completed, the bamboo effectively "attempted" to keep the bow in the unstrung shape. The result is that a greater force is needed to string the bow, and means that much more energy is stored in it for use in propelling the arrow. This is, of course, the principle of all composite bows. By this time, it is also likely that the first recurve had developed. Recurved bows

have the extremities of their upper and lower arms formed in such a way that, when strung, the tips (ears) of the bow curve slightly away from the\*124\* archer. This increase in curvature is the one of the first parts of the bow stretched during the draw and the last to recover after the release. It thus gives the arrow a final 'added kick' just before it leaves the string.

This wood and single-bamboo-laminate bow was called a fusetake yumi and was the product of fighting men in search of greater penetrating power in their primary weapon. This increase was in response to improvements in the design and construction of armor that were being made during this time. The oyoroi armor of the period reflects a great emphasis on defence against arrow attacks. Moreover, various modifications, the leather cover over the front lames of the torso protector, for example, were designed to make it easier to fire the bow while wearing armor. Likewise, arrows and points now began to lose the look of hunting weapons and rather quickly took on forms suitable to warfare, shapes which were to persist for centuries after.



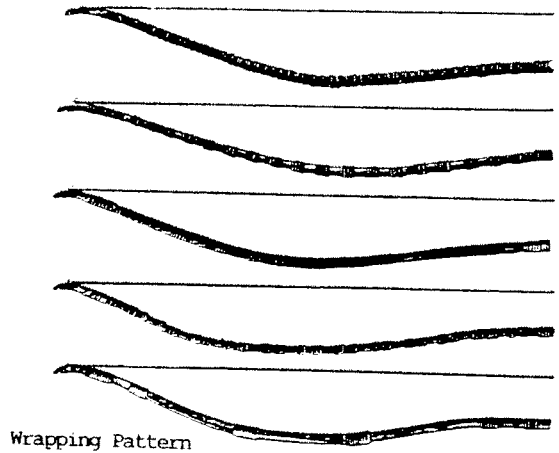
Fusetake Yumi and Section



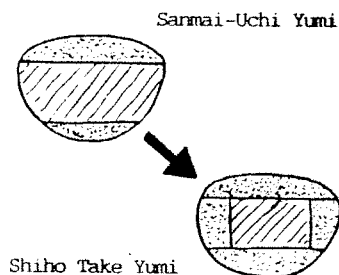
The end of the Heian period came with the fabled struggle between two rising martial clans, the Taira and the Minamoto. The provincial warrior cliques had developed into a true martial caste, the bushi. These two families, as the major factions, became embroiled in the intrigues of court politics, and were soon battling for control of the court and country from about 1150 until the Minamoto finally emerged victorious in 1185. Both sides relied heavily on archery, and further improvements were made in the composite bow of earlier times. The sanmai-uchi yumi appeared. This "three layer bow" was composed of a wooden core strengthened by bamboo laminated to both the face and the belly of the weapon. Arrow points became larger and heavier as the casting power of the bow increased. To make it easier to hold these tip-heavy arrows to the bow while in

action and on horseback, a sort of arrow rest called a **zuku** became popular. It was a simple metal fitting in the shape of an elongated "Z" which was bound into the grip of the bow facing to the right of the weapon when viewed from the archer. The arrow shaft was laid into the rest which assisted the left thumb and index finger in holding the arrow.

The Kamakura Shogunate, established by Minamoto no Yoritomo on the defeat of the Taira, brought the martial class to undisputed power and instituted a truly feudal government by the warrior elite. The bow and the horse remained the traditional and ultimate symbols of their status, despite the indisputable importance of the sword on the field of battle. The **sanmai-uchi yumi** was now the standard type. These composite bows were almost always lacquered and wrapped to prevent moisture from loosening the bond of the natural (**nibe**) glues that held them together. Rattan was the most common wrapping, but cords and birch bark were also used and a variety of wrapping patterns were developed. These methods of wrapping the bow in a functional and yet attractive design persist to this day.



The Nambokucho period (1336 - 1392), a time of civil war between competing court factions and their bushi supporters, was a time of increasing prominence for bladed weapons and dismounted combat. In fact it could be seen as the beginning of the decline of the elite and exclusive martial caste which had for centuries considered itself the embodiment of "**kyu-ba no michi**," the way of the bow and the horse. Still the bow and arrow were indispensable weapons, and further refinements were made. From this time, the names of many great warriors are known, many of whom were famous because of their great skill with the bow.



The unrelenting strife of the Muromachi period (1392 - 1573) may be seen as the end of the type of "limited war" that is generally practiced by hereditary martial elites. Such warfare is sometimes characterized as being "ritual," so highly regulated is it by a traditional morality recognized and respected by both sides.

Warfare was now in earnest, and almost any measure that promised victory was quickly adopted.

Military activities began to be dominated by the use of large armies of fighting men, many of whom could lay no claim to bushi status and were no more than conscripts, runaway farmers or soldiers of fortune. At this time, the construction of the bow was further improved by the development of an even more complex arrangement of bamboo strips bonded to wood. The **sanmai-uchi yumi** continued in use but the trend was toward the **shiho-take yumi**, the "four-way-bamboo bow." As the name implies, this bow had a rectangular wooden core completely encased by layers of bamboo which were applied to all four sides of the core. The face and belly layers overlayed the side strips so that from the outside the bow appeared to be completely constructed

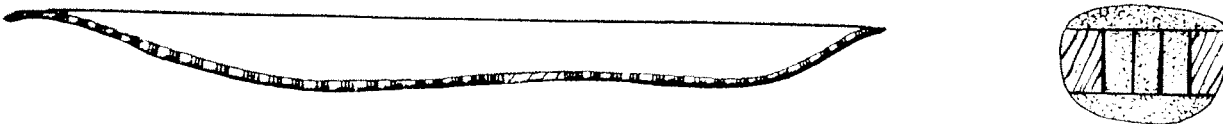
of the flexible grass. The bow and arrow remained the prime projectile weapon.

Accessories, such as quivers, evolved into lighter and smaller units designed for field use. Points became the product of specialized smiths who produced an almost bewildering array of forms, either for use or for display. Despite the history of continuous incremental improvements in the making of the bow, arrow and points, the method of its use remained rather consistent. The string was drawn back to about the centerline of the body in the area of the neck below the chin, any further stretching being prevented by the helmet and armor worn at the time. Although his dates are not clearly known, and several persons by the same name are recorded, it is a Kansai warrior called Heki Danjo who is credited with formally revising this time-honored form. He developed a more accurate style in which the arrow is drawn straight back at the level of the mouth (see Onuma article). This form of shot became the preferred method.

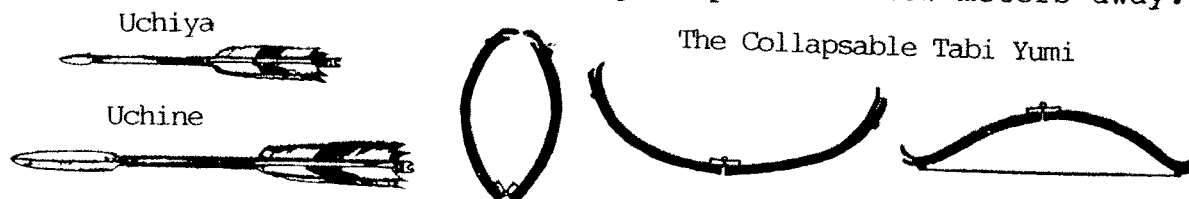
Even the introduction of firearms by the Portuguese in 1543 did not displace the bow completely. Although it meant that the bow was no longer the most devastating long range weapon, nor a decisive weapon in combat, bows remained in use throughout the period of "the country at war" due to its reliability, economy and availability. Guns were expensive, and their matchlock mechanisms were susceptible to changes in the weather, despite attempts to devise water resistant models. Paintings of all the major battles of the period include numbers of archers. Late in this period, there were other developments related to the bow and arrow. There appeared various auxiliary weapons based on the traditions (ryu-ha) of archery which were then thriving. Such innovations included hand propelled darts in the form of small arrows and larger versions tipped with spear points and used for close quarters self defence.

The establishment of the Tokugawa hegemony in 1615 brought peace to the nation and a general disuse of weapons in a combatively relevant fashion, even among the martial class. The bow became more and more associated with sport, and various games and competitions, some of which have their roots in the Kamakura period were practiced. The famous long distance shooting competition held in Kyoto's well-known Sanjusangen Do is probably the most outstanding. Here, archers shoot at a large target placed at the far end of the long, rectangular building. Since in such a game, penetrating power and considerations of arrow trajectory were not issues, bow makers strove to develop bows with a longer range. The result was the development of the hiko yumi, essentially the same type that is still used today in modern kyudo. In this "final" version, the wooden core has been replaced by a laminated section of several layers of bamboo, the usual number being three. These are then made wider by the addition of a strip of wood on each side. This combination was then covered on the face and belly by wide strips of bamboo very much like those applied over the wooden core of the sanmai-uchi bow.

The Hiko Yumi and Cross Section



The bow was studied throughout the Edo age and new, compact weapons for use during traveling and for self defence were perfected. Shooting even became a popular pastime for commoners in the form of the atari-ya, small shops where customers payed a fee to plunk away with miniature bows and arrows at targets placed a few meters away.



Diligent warriors mainly practised the bow in one of the *kyujutsu* fashions established by the *ryu-ha*. Their goal was to effectively hit the target. Other masters, however, began to stress the old ideas of the importance of spirit in the use of the bow, and even began to speak of "*kyudo*." The courtly, ceremonial, and mystical uses of various types of bows continued as they had since the Heian period. Moreover, other ceremonies devised by the *bushi*, such as the "*samurai gyoretsu*" style parade associated with the *sankin kotai* custom, also relied on the bow and arrow as central "props."

With the modernization and centralization of the country in the Meiji and later periods, the formal organization of a standard style of archery based on the Ogasawara Ryu was carried out. The resulting art incorporated only a fraction of the content of that tradition, however. It is this standard that is promoted by the All Japan Kyudo Federation (*Zen Nippon Kyudo Renmei*). Nonetheless, the art as practiced today remains much less rigidly controlled than most other federated modern martial arts, and the details of shooting often vary from dojo to dojo depending on the experience and background of the particular teacher. Regardless of these differences, the type of bow, shooting glove, arrows and other equipment are basically the same. (An exception is the very recent introduction of synthetic plastic bows, and arrows of fiber or aluminum; innovations that have been accepted by some.) The general atmosphere of the dojo, and the goals of training in the use of the bow are consistent with the goals of *kyudo*, "the Way of the Bow." It is a spiritually-oriented physical activity aimed at perfecting the inner human being.

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**GEKIKEN KOGYO: A Show or a Samurai Revival**  
by  
Laszlo Abel

The originator of the *gekiken kogyo*, those public displays of martial arts that were so popular in late 19th century Japan, was Sakakibara Kenkichi who featured in our last JMAS Newsletter. The massive wave of foreign culture and idealism flowing into Japan during the Meiji period had left little opportunity to make a living for those like Sakakibara who had devoted their lives to the practice of the traditional military arts. All of his own efforts at self-sufficiency were not productive enough to support him and this led him to decide to sell his dojo.

He was stopped from doing so by three men who were to briefly alter the course of his life: Shinmon Tetsugoro, Mikawaya Kosaburo and Nakura Yaichi. These commoners are generally credited with the idea of staging a martial arts show for the public. The times were ripe: a ready, somewhat confused Meiji society, plenty of unemployed samurai and the entrepreneurial skills of these merchant class (*chonin*) sponsors. A president, Tazawa Toshiaki, was elected, government sanction was gained and the first *gekiken kogyo* was held in April of 1873. Sakakibara was 43 years old at the time.

Kenkichi's personal wish was only to exhibit the skills that had been the backbone of Japan's traditional military arts, especially those of the sword, and to introduce the people who were responsible for their transmission to future generations. Although his intentions were truly sincere, negative responses to his conservative display caused the organizers to make great changes in the format of the presentation; changes designed to draw crowds. Kenkichi was not the only one to start such a show of the martial arts, but his "Sakakibara Gekikenkai" served as a model for similar activities by such groups as the Saito Yaguro Gekiken Kisokai, the Nagoya Gekikenkai and the Nomi Teijiro Gekikenkai.

Each *gekiken kogyo* was planned to last for ten consecutive days of fine weather. At the commencement, a crier was hired to vocally advertise the show. He would go around the streets of the town calling out something like;

"Welcome, welcome! Everyone, please come! Today a *gekiken kogyo* featuring duels between famous samurai will be held at Asakusa Saemongashi. Admittance is only one *shu*. If you wish to participate the entry fee is 300 *mon*, including the borrowing of all the necessary weapons: *shinai*, *yari*, *kusarigama* and *naginata*. Please come and see the show!"

Payment for each samurai who participated was between 30-50 *sen* per day. Women were also permitted to enter and records show that they often chose the *naginata* or *kusarigama* for use in their contests.

The *banzuke* was a further means of advertising. This was a printed program which was posted in conspicuous places. The one reproduced here contains the names of two famous samurai; Nishimura Kenpachiro, ex-leader of the Shogitai mentioned in the last Newsletter, and Nomi Teijiro, a member of the Kan-gun (Imperial army) who eventually held

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そうそうたる武蔵野が名を馳せる無類会の手付(玉屋)で責任

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Kenkishi's attempt to exhibit proper bujutsu techniques and stimulate an interest in the classical arts of the samurai failed. The gekiken kogyo was very soon transformed to offer something interesting and easy to understand for common audiences. To further increase its popularity, fight scenarios were prepared, rehearsed and performed. Women wearing short hakama (a skirt-like trouser) that expose their thighs were included. Over-expression became common. Kabuki-like, exaggerated poses would be struck to the

These degenerate **gekiken kogyo** became extremely popular. Over 10 were held by Kenkichi in Tokyo alone, not to mention those staged in different parts of the country. However, 'in the interests of public morality,' the authorities closed the **gekiken kogyo** of Sakakibara Kenkichi only three months after it opened. This government action did not prevent imitators from starting other shows. The list at the end of this article gives a brief look at just a few of the shows that were staged.

## The JMAS Newsletter

<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>MAIN EXPONENTS</u>	<u>WEAPON/SCHOOL REPRESENTED</u>	<u>DATE</u>
Asakusa Saemon-cho Gashi	Sakakibara Kenkichi	Sword (Jikishin Kage Ryu)	1873 April - May
Onote Jinbo-cho, Asakusa	Okada Takeo	Sword	1873 May - July
Saifuku-ji	Saito Yaguro	Sword (Shindo Munen Ryu)	" " "
Shitaya Gokenmachi	Iso Mataemon Iso Masanobu Iso Motoyuki Fukuda Iachinosuke Kurosawa Keitaro Miyamoto Taminosuke Mizuno Hisane Nonoto Yae	Ju-Jutsu (Tenjin Shinyo Ryu)	1873 July - Nov.
Asakusa Kotobuki-cho	Kaiho Junkichi and others	Sword (Hokushin Itto Ryu)	
Bakuro-cho	Kusakari Shogoro	Bajutsu (Horsemanship) (Kusakari-Ryu)	Nov. -
Saemongashi	Totsuka Hikosuke	Ju-Jutsu (Yoshin-Ryu)	June
Reiganjima Echizenbori	Watanabe Rakunosuke	Sword, Spear, Nagakusarigana, Ju-jutsu	
Nagoya - called, Nagoya Gekiken-kai			1873 July
Saitama Kurohana-mura			1873 Nov.
Asakusa Kannon Keidai	Nomi Teijiro (Nomi Teijiro Gekiken-kai)	Sword	1880 July
Yokohama Matsujae-cho - called, Yokohama Gekiken-kai			1885 April
Honjo Ekoin Keidai - called, Tokyo Kobusha Gekiken-kai			1897 January



old man offers his criticism of the shows that were then the rage:

"This is concerning the matter of the recent starting of gekiken kogyo by Sakakibara Kenkichi Sensei. I know that he hoped to revitalize the martial arts which are presently on the decline. Still, as an old man, I am extremely sad and sorry at the cheap, money-making device that the gekiken kogyo has become. A sense of wisdom and shame are both most certainly lacking."

The Mayor of Kyoto also commented in a letter dated April 28, 1880:

"Gekiken kogyo have been held of late, but they seem to be (little more than) a means of selling the names of those participating. To worsen things, they deceive people and expose them to violence. Remember the saying, 'Amateur tactics cause grave wounds.' Moreover, they are very dangerous considering the way the head, throat and face are aimed for. These people would do better to utilise their energy and efforts for solid work, and strive to have a healthy and sound life ...."

As can be seen from the list, gekiken kogyo contests were held almost up to the beginning of this century. What explains their popularity? Were the gekiken kogyo just a showy exploitation of the martial arts, or were they the very last attempts at reviving them by creating a place for the martial arts (bujutsu) in the modern world? Could the show-like features of the gekiken kogyo have been a motivating factor in the Meiji era change from the idea of 'jutsu' to that of 'do'? Did they signal the beginnings of the movement towards the "softer," "gentler" types of martial ways?

Whatever the answers to these questions, the gekiken kogyo did in fact pull together a remarkable group of martial-arts-oriented people. Unfortunately, as seems to be the case with almost any endeavor, the bigger and more popular it became, the more it fell into disarray. This is one law of life that has not changed throughout history.

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